

## **Public Assistance Available to Ex-offenders** **Preparing for Release from Prison**

This document was prepared by the Virginia Employment Commission and is offered as a service to counselors, family members, and others assisting ex-offenders in their efforts to return to the workforce. Some information in this document has been provided by the partner agencies noted, and was deemed to be accurate at the time of publication.

The key to a successful transition into your new community is early preparation. Approximately 120 days prior to your release date, it is important that you begin to make contact with as many supportive service agencies as possible. In order to qualify for specific benefits or services, a counselor or caseworker will need to obtain specific information regarding your particular situation.

Keep in mind that in order for you to obtain supportive services, from state and federally funded organizations, you must apply, and you must meet certain eligibility requirements. Service organizations must evaluate each applicant individually, because the level of assistance and the length of eligibility can vary greatly depending upon various circumstances such as age, disability, income potential, specific skills or trade certifications, level of education, number and age of dependents, etc. Before you apply for assistance, you may be asked to provide the following documentation:

**Social Security Card.** If you've lost your card, contact the local Social Security Office for a replacement by calling 1-800-772-1213, weekdays between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.)

**Birth or Marriage Certificate.** If you need a copy of your birth or marriage certificate, individuals born/married in the State of Virginia, should contact:

Division of Vital Records  
P.O. Box 1000  
Richmond, Virginia 23218-1000  
(804) 662-6200  
<http://www.soc.vipnet.org/>

Individuals who were born in a state other than Virginia can also contact personnel at the above address to obtain information and assistance in obtaining vital records from all other states. Social Security Cards and Birth Certificates may also be applied for by inmates prior to release through their Case Management Counselor. The Department of Corrections has an agreement with SSA and Vital Records to provide this critical pre-release function.

**Virginia Driver's License.** (Picture ID) Virginia residents can obtain information about first-time licensing or renewal by visiting their local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Office, or by visiting the website at: <http://www.dmv.state.va.us/webdoc/citizen/drivers/applying.asp>

**Certification of US Citizenship.** Call INS toll free at 1-800-375-5283 for information and help on matters concerning immigration services and benefits, or visit the website at <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>

**Orders of Release.** These documents will be issued to you upon your release.

**GED Information.** The purpose of providing General Educational Development (GED) information is to enable those who do not have a copy of the high school equivalency to obtain one. Many employers will not hire if an individual does not have a high school diploma or equivalent (GED).

GED Administrator - Office of Adult Education  
Department of Education  
101 North 14th Street  
P.O. Box 2120  
Richmond, VA 23218-2120  
(804) 371-2333

Additional information may be found on the Department of Education website at: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Adult/index.html>

You should also contact the following organizations, well in advance of your release, to inquire about benefits that you may qualify for.

### **Social Security Administration**

Please note that Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits are not payable for months that you are confined to a jail, prison, or certain other public institutions for the commission of a crime. You are not automatically eligible for Social Security or SSI benefits when you are released. In all cases, however, you must apply for benefits with a Social Security Office if you think you qualify. Although you cannot receive benefits while you are confined to jail or prison, your spouse or children, if they are eligible, can be paid benefits on your record. The Department of Corrections has a pre-release agreement with SSA to process SSI applications prior to release. The DOC cannot process SSDI, Food Stamps or other applications prior to release. Inmates should consult their counselor for assistance with this process.

Social Security Disability Benefits can be paid only to people who have recently worked and paid Social Security taxes, and who are unable to work because of a serious medical condition that is expected to last for at least a year or result in death. The fact that an individual is a recent parolee or is unemployed does not qualify as a disability.

Who decides if I am disabled? The Social Security Administration will review your application to determine if you meet basic requirements for disability benefits. They will look at whether you have worked long enough and recently enough, and your age. The office will send your application to the Disability Determination Services (DDS) office in your state. The DDS will decide whether you are disabled under the Social Security law. They will use the medical evidence from your doctors and from hospitals, clinics or institutions where you have been treated and any other information they have available. Once a decision is reached, you will be sent a letter. If your claim is approved, the letter will show the amount of your benefit and when payments will start.

**Social Security Retirement Benefits** can be paid only to people who are 62 or older. Generally, you must have worked and paid taxes into Social Security for 10 years to be eligible.

**SSI Benefits** can be paid to people who are 65 or older or blind or disabled and who have low income and few resources. No SSI benefits are payable for any months that you reside in prison.

If you want to find out how much your future Social Security benefits will be, or if you want to check the earnings that have been reported for you to the Social Security Administration, you can get a free Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement by calling 1-800-772-1213 and asking for Form SSA-7004. (All calls are confidential)

Social Security Administration  
100 Poplar Drive  
Petersburg, VA 23805  
(804) 862-6080

Find additional information on their website at: <http://www.ssa.gov/>

### **Department of Social Services.**

**General Emergency Relief** provides limited financial assistance to individuals and families. If you are eligible for assistance from TANF or SSI, you may or may not be eligible for General Relief. Because General Relief is a local program, the kind of assistance available varies from agency to agency. Ask your local Social Services representative what kinds of General Relief assistance are available.

Depending upon your local agency, limited financial assistance may be provided in the following situations:

- You are able to work but are unemployed;
- You are not able to work because of a disability, age, lack of training or experience, or because of illness in the family or other home responsibilities;
- You are in a treatment center, halfway house, or group home;

- You have on-going medical needs;
- You have applied for SSI or you are appealing an SSI decision;
- You have a minor child in your home but do not qualify for TANF because you are not a close relative;
- You have emergency food, shelter, medical or clothing needs; or you are a transient or you are relocating and need emergency help with expenses.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** is a program that provides temporary financial assistance to eligible families with children. The family receives a monthly cash payment to meet their basic needs. To be eligible, a family must be financially needy and must meet certain other requirements such as those listed below. A child may be eligible if he:

- Is under age 18, or if 18, will graduate from high school before age 19.
- Is going to school regularly if he is between the ages of 5 and 18.
- Is living with a parent or other relative, and
- Is a citizen of the U.S. or an eligible immigrant.

A child will not be eligible if born to or adopted by a TANF recipient more than 10 months after an applicant begins to receive TANF. The Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) will send all support collected for this child directly to the family. This support will not count as income in the TANF program.

**Food Stamps** are coupons that can be used to buy food at any store that accepts food stamps. (In the near future, an agency debit card will replace food stamp coupons). You can apply for food stamps at the local department of social services the same day you request an application for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or General Relief.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) offices located in this area are:

DSS – Chesterfield/Colonial Heights  
 9501 Lucy Corr Circle  
 P.O. Box 430  
 Chesterfield, Virginia 23832  
 (804) 748-1100

DSS – Petersburg  
 400 Farmer Street  
 P.O. Box 2127  
 Petersburg, Virginia 23804  
 (804) 861-4720

DSS – Prince George  
6450 Administration Drive  
P.O. Box 68  
Prince George, Virginia 23875  
(804) 733-2650

Visit the website at: <http://www.dss.state.va.us>

### **The Department of Rehabilitative Services**

The Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) provides vocational rehabilitation, which is the State-Federal service delivery system that assists people with disabilities so that they may prepare for, enter, or retain gainful employment. An individual is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services if they have a physical or mental disability AND the disability causes a substantial barrier to getting or keeping a job. Vocational rehabilitation services are provided depending upon an individual's needs, interests, and capabilities and must be essential to reaching an employment goal. These services may include, but are not limited to vocational counseling, vocational evaluation, career exploration, training, and job placement assistance.

The DRS office located in your immediate area is:

DRS – Petersburg  
2795 South Crater Road, Suite 1  
Petersburg, Virginia 23805  
(804) 524-3950

Visit the website at: <http://www.vadrs.org>

### **Virginia Workforce Center**

The Crater Regional Planning District Local Workforce Investment Area XV Comprehensive One-Stop Centers and Satellite Offices will promote maximum employment opportunities that support local and regional economic development activities for the cities of Petersburg, Colonial Heights, Hopewell and Emporia, and the counties of Dinwiddie, Greensville, Prince George, Surry, Sussex and southern Chesterfield. The vision of the centers, in accordance with the plan developed by the US Department of Labor, is to have and promote a well-trained, well-educated, highly skilled and qualified workforce that is actively engaged in lifelong learning. The performance-based centers provide job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers universal access to information and services to assist all customers in making informed career choices and/or hiring decisions.

One-Stop Resource Centers offer the following services:

- Listings of federal, state, and local job openings
- Jobs bulletin board, job vacancy books and periodicals
- Computer access for internet/job search websites and resume preparation
- Skills testing and individualized employment interest assessment
- Labor market information on top industries: Jobs in demand or on the decline
- Up-to-date equipment and technology available for job searches including fax, copier, typewriter, paper, supplies, and telephone
- Pre-Employment Training
- Vocational/Career Exploration
- Workshops and Job Fairs
- GED Preparation
- Job Specific Skills Training
- On-the-Job Training

The VEC Workforce Centers located in your immediate area are:

The Virginia Employment Commission / Virginia Workforce Center  
5240 Oaklawn Boulevard  
Hopewell, Virginia 23860  
(804) 541-6548

The Virginia Employment Commission / Virginia Workforce Center  
1746 East Atlantic Street  
Emporia, Virginia 23847  
(434) 634-2326

Be sure to visit the VEC website at: <http://VaEmploy.Com>

Additional information for this area may be found by logging on to the Workforce Investment Area 15 web site at:

<http://www.careerconnect.state.va.us/15craterarea/wib15/>

### **Crisis Assistance Response Emergency Shelter (CARES)**

CARES is a regional shelter which services the communities of Chesterfield, Colonial Heights, Dinwiddie, Hopewell, Petersburg, and Prince George. As a United Way Services partner agency, it serves individuals and families experiencing a housing crisis, victims of domestic violence, and stranded travelers. CARES can usually provide food, clothing and other assistance, including travel vouchers for stranded travelers. In addition, CARES staff can suggest other community resources and make referrals, if needed.

The center located in your immediate area:

CARES Service Center  
120 East Washington Street  
Petersburg, Virginia 23803  
(804) 861-6191  
Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday thru Friday

**Project SOAR** (Supporting Offenders After Release)

This is a volunteer partnership between the Virginia Department of Corrections and the faith community to help offenders become productive citizens and reduce the likelihood that they will return to prison. For more information visit their website at: <http://www.vadoc.state.va.us/offenders/institutions/programs/soar.shtm>

Additional pre-release assistance may be found through the services offered by the

**District 19 Community Services Board**  
**20 West Bank Street**  
**Petersburg, VA 23803**  
**Phone: (804)862-8054**

Visit their website at: <http://www.d19csb.com/>

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